

Public Health Committee,

I read recently in the Journal Inquirer that there is a proposal that a state law be passed to seal the death certificates of children, in light of the media frenzy following the deaths at Sandy Hook Elementary School.

While I totally sympathize with the parents of these children and agree that action must be taken in this incident, as a genealogist, I would like to request that rather than permanently sealing all children's death certificates, that you make a one time law sealing the death certificates of these children for a period of time, say 25 to 50 years and do not seal all children's death certificates. At the very least, if you must involve all children, limit the time to 25 years.

My reasoning is that as a genealogist, the death certificates of children are of tremendous value to me. Here are three examples:

1. A few years ago, while researching the death of a cousin's great grandmother, I discovered a ten foot monument in Mt. St. Benedict Cemetery in Bloomfield CT. In addition to the person I was researching (The Reverend Thomas Sullivan born in Hartford, Oct. 17, 1874) I found seven of his siblings listed on the monument. I noted by the ages and dates that six of the siblings had died as young children, three in one week. Even though these deaths occurred over a hundred years ago, between 1882 and 1887, it was a devastating discovery. I was able to go to the City of Hartford and discover from their death certificates that they all died of diphtheria. The three died while their mother was pregnant with Thomas. Their father, James Sullivan was, at the time, a Hartford City Councilman. Unfortunately he passed away eight years later of pneumonia. His wife died three years later. There are no living members of this family so no one knew of the tragedy in this family until I rediscovered it.
2. My mother had always told me that she had two siblings who died as children. One, the oldest in the family, Adolf, died at the age of two months. The youngest, Rita, who had Down Syndrome, died at the age of three. I was finally able to get to New York City to access the death certificates of these two children a few years ago. I discovered that there were errors in the family memories. First, Adolph was born in Aug. 1909, not Oct. 1906 as I was told. I discovered this from his death certificate as the birth certificate could not be found. He died on Dec. 17, 1909 at the age of four months of pneumonia, not two months and he was the second child in the family, not the first. Rita was born in Dec. 1929, not 1927 as I had been told. Again, the information was from her death certificate as a birth certificate could not be found. She lived until March 21, 1933 and died of pneumonia at Ward's Island where she had been institutionalized. She died at the age of four, not 1 year as I had been told.

I know that these are stories from eighty to a hundred years ago, but someone in 3013 may be searching for information about a family member who died in 2015 for a variety of reasons. While the deaths of children are fairly unusual these days, we hope that none of them will be forgotten. Whether they die of leukemia, muscular dystrophy, car accident or any other reason, future genealogists should not be denied the opportunity to view original documents dealing with

their deaths. I implore you not to permanently seal any death records. A time limit would serve your purposes while allowing future generations to find answers to their questions.

Sincerely,

*Linda Carlson*

Linda Carlson  
21 Bremen Rd.  
Manchester CT 06040